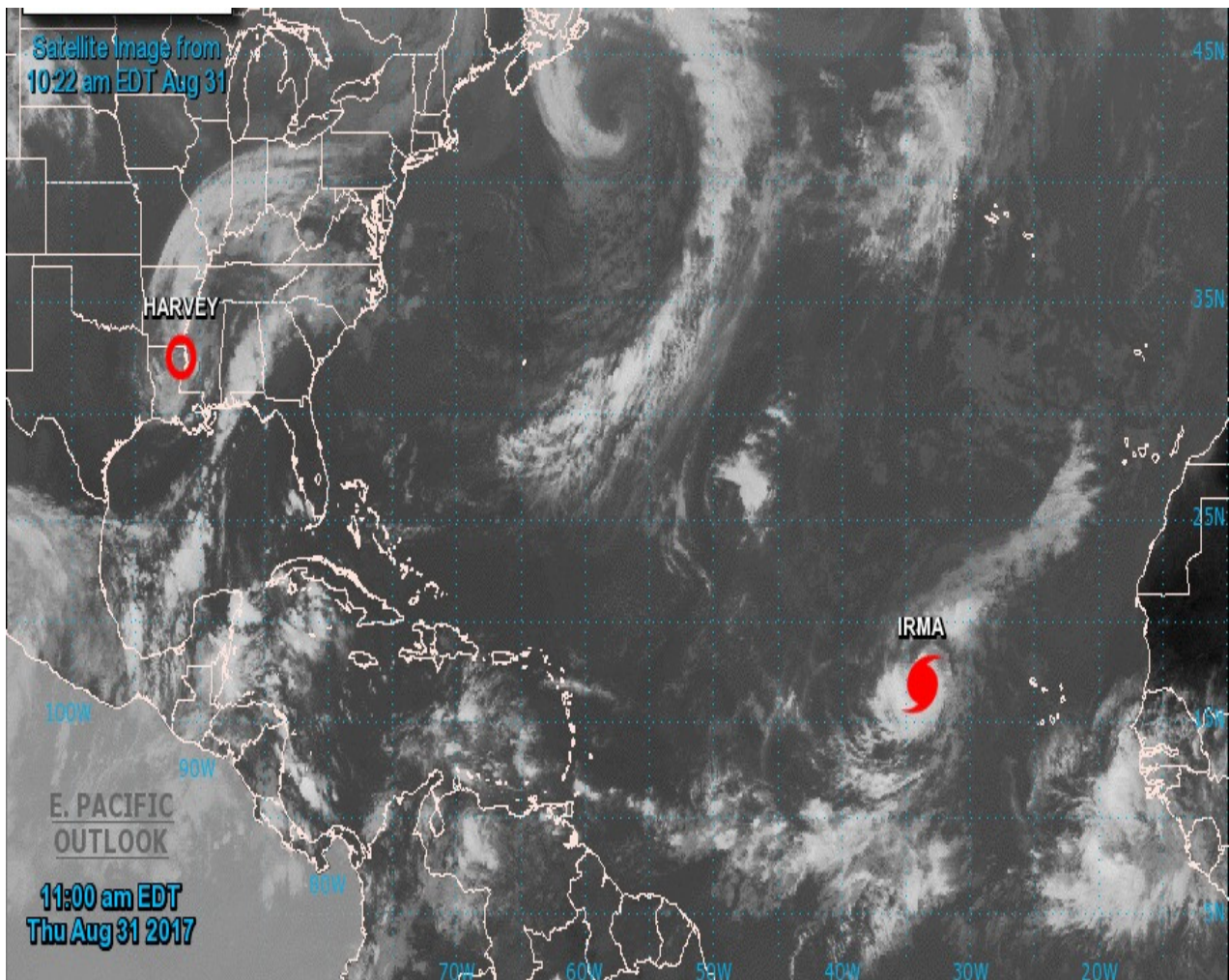


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Irma Becomes Hurricane; Expected To Be 'Extremely Dangerous.' USVI Advised To Be Ready

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Irma has intensified into hurricane strength packing sustained winds of near 100 miles per hour, according to the National Hurricane Center. Forecasters are predicting the tropical cyclone may become a major hurricane by tonight.

According to the National Hurricane Center, at 11:00 a.m., the center of Hurricane Irma was located near Latitude 16.9 degrees North, Longitude 33.8 degrees West. Irma is moving toward the west-northwest near 10 miles per hour. This general motion is forecast through early Friday, followed by a generally westward motion on Saturday.

The storm is "expected to be an extremely dangerous hurricane for the next several days," N.H.C. stated in its 11:00 a.m. update. Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 15 miles from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 80 miles.

According to National Weather Service at San Juan, much of the guidance indicates that Irma will turn slightly southwest in a couple of days in response to some building of high pressure to the north and northwest. However, there is a lot of uncertainty associated with the forecast track and intensity of Irma. Impacts will depend on the final track and intensity of the tropical cyclone.

Marine conditions will likely deteriorate by early next week. Seas of 10 feet or greater and winds of 25 to 30 knots or greater are possible by midweek, according to the National Weather Service.

VITEMA Director Mona Barnes is encouraging the community to closely monitor weather reports on Hurricane Irma, and to be ready in the event the territory is placed under a hurricane watch or warning.

"Although there is still uncertainty with the track of Hurricane Irma, now is the time to make sure you are ready," Ms. Barnes said. "Don't wait for a hurricane watch or warning to prepare. Stock up on emergency supplies now, make sure everyone in your home knows what to do in an emergency and stay informed about the weather."

"We have been fortunate in the past few years. The territory has been spared from the type of devastation we have seen in Houston over the past several days. But we cannot afford to be complacent," Ms. Barnes concluded.